

BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES

BREASTFEEDING AS DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION AND

EMBODIED EXPERIENCE

VIRGINIA SCHMIED RN CM BA MA (Hons)

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

FACULTY OF NURSING

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY, SYDNEY

1998

CERTIFICATE

I hereby certify that this thesis has not already been submitted for any degree and is not being submitted as part of a candidature for any other degree.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me and that any help I have received in preparing this thesis, and all sources used, have been acknowledged in this thesis.

Signature of Candidate

VA. Schmid

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the encouragement, support and guidance of family, friends and colleagues, I would not have been able to undertake, let alone complete this thesis. There are many people I wish to thank.

To begin with I wish to sincerely thank the 25 women who have participated in this study. These women gave generously of their time, their thoughts and emotions. Coming to know them, their partners and babies was a privilege and the most enjoyable part of this research. Importantly, they have shown me aspects of contemporary motherhood and the experience of breastfeeding that I had thought little about and that have implications for the practice of midwives and nurses.

My partner, Rinke Schoneveld and our sons, Liam and Sam, have continuously supported me with their love, patience and good humour through this tiring process. In particular, thank you Liam and Sam for making breastfeeding such an enjoyable experience. Thank you also to my father and my friends who have understood the demands of writing a thesis and have continued to ring me despite my being remiss in maintaining contact.

Most importantly, I am indebted to my supervisors Lesley Barclay and Deborah Lupton. Thank you Lesley for your eternal optimism and confidence in my ability to complete this work, and more importantly that this work would contribute significantly to midwifery and nursing knowledge. Not only did I receive fantastic academic supervision, but I have learnt and continue to learn from your insights into midwifery practice and the new directions that are imperative for the health of families. Many thanks also to Deborah for your support and encouragement. Your theoretical and methodological skill and clarity assisted me greatly.

Thank you to my friends and colleagues in our postgraduate group, particularly, Linda Jones, Annie Mills, Helen Callaghan, Margaret Duff, Margaret Cooke and Jenny Fenwick. The sharing of common triumphs, pitfalls and difficulties has been invaluable. Thanks also to Greg Fairbrother, Murray Lean and James Mabbutt, for their enthusiasm

and insights, as we conducted the interviews with these women and their male partners.

In addition I need to thank Leanne Sullivan, Tracey Adelle, Elizabeth Nagy, Janelle Gilbert, Joanna Farrell, Stella Katsoulotots, for their meticulous transcription of the data and Kim McEvoy, Leanne Sullivan and Tracey Adelle for their willingness to perform innumerable administrative tasks for me. Robyn Chalklen has contributed significantly to the production of this thesis with her skillful proofreading, editing and assistance with layout of the document. Thank you also to Jenny Fenwick for reading the final draft of this thesis.

Finally I need to acknowledge the Australian Federal Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs and the University of Technology, Sydney for the provision of an Australian Postgraduate Research Award, which has allowed me to undertake my doctoral studies as a full time student. In addition, the Australian Research Council provided funding for the study 'Discourses of Parenting', of which this thesis is a part.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	x
INTRODUCTION	1
The Imperative to Mother	3
A World Apart: Nursing/Midwifery and Feminist Understandings of Motherhood	4
The Maternal Body	7
The Current Study	8
Some Personal Reflections	13
CHAPTER ONE	15
STUDYING MATERNAL SUBJECTIVITY	
1.1 SUBJECTIVITY - A POSTSTRUCTURALIST APPROACH	15
Why Poststructuralism?	16
The Central Place of Language and Subjectivity	16
Language and Discourse	18
Deconstructing Boundaries and Dualisms	21
1.2 STUDYING SUBJECTIVITY THROUGH DISCOURSE ANALYSIS	24
What is Discourse Analysis?	24
Approaches to Data Collection and Transcription	26
Approaches to Data Analysis	27
1.3 CREATING THE TEXT	29
How 'Text' was Produced	29
Who Participated	30
Orchestrating the Interviews	32
Creating 'Text' - Interview Questions	33
Ethical Considerations	34
Further Ethical Considerations - the Nature of the Interview Relationship	36
CONCLUSION	41

CHAPTER TWO.....	42
THE MATERNAL SUBJECT IN NURSING AND MIDWIFERY THEORY AND RESEARCH: CONSTRUCTING THE BOUNDARIES	
2.1 ROLES, TRANSITION AND ATTACHMENT:	
AN OVERVIEW OF NURSING RESEARCH	42
Transition to the Maternal Role	42
Attachment and Bonding.....	45
Theoretical Perspectives Informing Maternity Nursing Research	47
2.2 PSYCHOANALYTIC DISCOURSES, FEMININITY AND MATERNAL SUBJECTIVITY	48
2.3 INFANT ATTACHMENT AND MATERNAL DEPRIVATION - AN INFANT-CENTRED DISCOURSE.....	53
2.4 BONDING AND MATERNAL ATTACHMENT - CENTERING THE 'GOOD' MOTHER	56
Attachment and Bonding in Nursing Discourse	59
2.5 ADDING THE SOCIAL: TRANSITION THEORIES	61
2.6 DECONSTRUCTING MATERNAL ROLE ATTAINMENT.....	65
Discourse of the Self as a Rational and Contained Individual	66
Discourse of the Essential Feminine Identity	69
Mastery Over Task and Role	70
Maternal Subjectivity - Simple and Tidy versus Complex and Messy	76
CONCLUSION.....	78
 CHAPTER THREE.....	 81
BREASTFEEDING AS DISCURSIVE CONSTRUCTION: ANALYSING THE PROFESSIONAL AND POPULAR LITERATURE	
3.1 PUBLIC HEALTH DISCOURSE.....	81
Breast is Best for Baby, the Environment and the Global Economy	82
Discourses of Bonding and Attachment.....	83
The Concern for Why Women <u>Do Not</u> Breastfeed	84
- breastfeeding rates.....	84
- identifying women who do not breastfeed.....	85
- intervening to increase breastfeeding rates	86
- breast, nipples and babies: disembodiment in midwifery and nursing texts.....	87
- public policy: promotion and support or regulation and surveillance?	88

3.2 ADDING THE SOCIAL: DISCOURSES OF CULTURE	90
3.3 SHIFTING PUBLIC DISCOURSE	94
The Traditional 'Good' Mother	94
Modern Accounts of the 'Good' Mother	95
Breastfeeding: a Satisfying and Sensual Experience	95
The Language of Personal 'Success' and Achievement	97
Rational and Autonomous Decision Making: the Right to Choose	98
3.4 WOMEN'S PERSONAL DISCOURSE AND EXPERIENCE	100
CONCLUSION	103
 CHAPTER FOUR.....	 105
MATERNAL SUBJECTIVITY AND EMBODIMENT - SYNTHESISING THEORY	
4.1 MERGING THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE BODY	105
4.2 BODY IMAGE AND BODY BOUNDARIES - THE WORK OF PAUL SCHILDER	
FROM A NURSING PERSPECTIVE.....	109
The Body Schema	110
The Interior Body	111
Body Boundaries	112
4.3 THE SENSING AND PERCEIVING BODY - A PHENOMENOLOGICAL	
PERSPECTIVE	115
4.4 POSTSTRUCTURALIST PERSPECTIVES	118
Michel Foucault and the Body	118
Regulation, Surveillance and Monitoring	120
Power and Resistance	122
Practices of the Self	124
The Emotional Body.....	129
The 'Civilized' Body	131-
4.5 A FEMINIST APPROACH: CORPOREAL FLOWS AND	
BODILY CONNECTIONS.....	134
CONCLUSION	141

CHAPTER FIVE	143
PERSONAL CONSTRUCTIONS: OF MOTHERHOOD AND BREASTFEEDING	
5.1 TRISH AND BABY MITCHELL	143
5.2 JANE AND BABY LOUISE.....	152
5.3 SIMONE AND BABY CATHERINE.....	165
CONCLUSION	176
 CHAPTER SIX	 179
BREASTFEEDING AND THE MATERNAL BODY: THE CONNECTED EXPERIENCE	
6.1 CONSTRUCTING MOTHERHOOD AND THE ‘GOOD’ MOTHER: AN OVERVIEW.....	180
6.2 BREASTFEEDING AS SYNONYMOUS WITH MOTHERING.....	182
Breastfeeding: ‘Natural’ and Taken for Granted.....	183
Breastfeeding: Establishing a Relationship Between Mother and Child.....	184
‘Breast is Best’ - The Perfect Gift for Your Baby.....	185
A ‘Good’ Mother Breastfeeds.....	187
Persevering: Breastfeeding Shaping Maternal Subjectivity.....	188
‘Something Special About Breastfeeding’	190
Breastfeeding - a Non Committed Approach.....	191
6.3 BREASTFEEDING AS A CONNECTED, HARMONIOUS AND INTIMATE EMBODIMENT	193
Shared Bodies	194
Dependent and Needed Bodies	197
Harmonious and Flowing Bodies	199
Sensual, Intimate and Pleasurable Bodies.....	201
Connection or Possession?.....	205
CONCLUSION.....	206

CHAPTER SEVEN	208
BREASTFEEDING AND THE MATERNAL BODY: THE DISCONNECTED EXPERIENCE	
7.1 DISRUPTED AND UNCIVILISED BODIES	209
7.2 DISTORTED BODIES AND UNCIVILISED CONNECTIONS	217
Searing Pain and Mutilation	218
Portrayal of Lactating Breasts and Breast Milk	221
7.3 DISCONNECTED BODIES.....	225
The 'Good' Baby/'Bad' Mother.....	227
The 'Uncivilised' Baby/'Good Enough' Mother.....	231
CONCLUSION	235
 CHAPTER EIGHT.....	 236
BREASTFEEDING AND THE MATERNAL BODY: PRACTICES OF EXCLUSION, PERSERVERANCE AND REGULATION	
8.1 MAINTAINING THE CONNECTED AND INTIMATE EXPERIENCE OF BREASTFEEDING: PRACTICES OF EXCLUSION	236
The Connected Embodied Experience of Breastfeeding Contradicts the Rhetoric of Shared Parenting.....	237
Men Challenging the Boundaries Between Mother and Baby	242
Rationalising the Desire for Exclusivity	243
Women Including Their Partner.....	244
8.2 SEEKING IDENTITY, CONNECTION AND INTIMACY: PRACTICES OF 'PERSEVERENCE'.....	247
Seeking Connection and Harmony	249
Seeking Sensuality and Pleasure	252
8.3 CIVILIZING THE INFANT BODY: PRACTICES OF FLEXIBILITY AND REGULATION	255
The Challenge of Maintaining Flexibility in Infant Care Practices.....	257
Developing a Focus on Regulation and Control	262
Drawing Upon the 'Experts'	265
CONCLUSION	269

CHAPTER NINE	271
BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES: CONTRADICTIONS AND UNCERTAINTY IN THE EMBODIED EXPERIENCE OF BREASTFEEDING	
9.1 NURSING THEORY AND THE EMBODIED EXPERIENCE OF BREASTFEEDING	273
Pregnancy and Breastfeeding: Similarities in the Non-Discursive Experience.....	273
Nursing Theories and the Imperative to Restore Certainty to Body Boundaries.....	275
9.2 EMBODIED CONNECTIONS: TOLERATING THE BLURRED BOUNDARY BETWEEN MOTHER AND CHILD	279
9.3 CONTRADICTIONS AND AMBIGUITY IN EMBODIED CONNECTIONS: A LACK OF TOLERANCE FOR BLURRED BOUNDARIES	291
The Disrupted Body	291
The Distorted Body	294
Disconnected Bodies.....	297
9.4 THE CONTRADICTION OF CONTROL: RELAXED, CALM AND ‘GOING WITH THE FLOW’ VERSUS UNCERTAINTY AND AMBIGUITY.....	299
CONCLUSION	303
CONCLUSION	305
IMPLICATIONS FOR MIDWIFERY AND NURSING PRACTICE	309
Breastfeeding and Mothering: Are They Synonymous?	310
The Embodied Nature of Breastfeeding	311
Contradictions and Tensions.....	314
CONCLUSION	315
APPENDIX A	317
APPENDIX B	322
APPENDIX C	326
APPENDIX D	330
APPENDIX E	332
REFERENCES	333

ABSTRACT

This thesis studies maternal subjectivity in a group of 25 Australian women in the 1990s. The research uses a poststructuralist perspective to answer the question: How do women create a maternal subjectivity and give meaning to their lives when they become mothers for the first time? Discourse analysis is used to analyse data collected through a series of interviews with women, from late pregnancy to six months after birth. The early finding that breastfeeding was central to women's experience as mothers focused this research on the place of breastfeeding and the maternal body in the construction of contemporary motherhood.

The majority of participating women constructed breastfeeding as crucial to their maternal identity. They were committed to breastfeeding. In their accounts, breastfeeding was 'natural' and 'taken for granted', pivotal to their relationship with their baby, 'best for the baby', and something that a 'good' mother does. Personal accounts of success and achievement were particularly prominent. Breastfeeding required 'perseverance' and became an 'identity project'.

Breastfeeding, however, was not only constructed in Foucauldian terms through varying discourses, but was simultaneously an 'embodied' experience, sensed and perceived by women in diverse ways. This embodied or 'non-discursive' dimension of breastfeeding was difficult for these women to articulate and is poorly understood by health professionals. For some, breastfeeding fostered a connected, intimate and sensual relationship with the baby. These women were comfortable with or tolerated the 'blurred' boundaries of self and 'other', mother and child. Other women, however, found breastfeeding to be disruptive of body boundaries and routines, and distorting of their known experience of their breasts and body. At times, they felt disconnected or desired 'separation' from their infants. This difficult and distressing breastfeeding experience challenges the public and professional discourses that persuade women to breastfeed. The connected and intimate embodied experience of breastfeeding, however, presents a threat to a woman's sense of rational autonomy and independence.

This thesis uses feminist and other poststructuralist and phenomenological theories, to explore the complexity of the relationship between personal embodied experiences and the public and professional discourses and practices of breastfeeding. The findings of this study challenge midwives, nurses and lactation consultants to understand the diversity of women's personal experience of breastfeeding. Health professionals need to reflect upon their role in producing and reproducing the contradictions and tensions of motherhood and breastfeeding in the late 1990s.